

Once upon a time, there was a very green city. Everything in this city was green,

the buildings, the clouds, the streets and even the people. However, in this city, lived a large family of blue people. These people hailed from California, and once they got to this rainy green town, they all turned blue out of the sheer sadness. One of the family members had a daughter named Madalyn, though she grew up in this rainy town, she too was very blue. For being quite sad, she did love to talk. She talked so much and so fast that subtitles appeared as she talked, just to keep track of her train of thought. She was also forced to wear a leash, if she did not she'd hopelessly follow her friends around like a lost puppy (safe to say she was quite loyal). One day, as Madalyn walked through her green door to her green house, she noticed her mother was a whole new shade of dark blue.

"Mom what's wrong?" she inquired.

"Our family has disappeared" her mother wailed.

"What do you mean they disappeared? Where have they gone?" Madalyn continued to question.

"It seems the man in the mountain must have taken them."

In this rainy town and many, many others, there was a belief that a great and powerful man that lived in a mountain. He was the creator of everything and had control of everything as well.

People built the prettiest of all the green buildings for him and put there crisp, green money in baskets in the hopes he would show mercy to them. Some had claimed to see this man, some saying that he was very old with a long white beard, others saying he had many limbs and wore bright colors, and a variety of other stories. Madalyn had had it with this man in the mountain.

"What right does he have to destroy what he GAVE to us?!? I'm going to find this man, talk to him, and get the rest of our family back" Madalyn proclaimed.

"That will be too long of a journey Madalyn," her mother warned.

"It's worth it to get back what we lost."

Madalyn's mother packed her a small bag, with supplies and food for her hike up the mountain. Her mother told her that at the base of the mountain lived a kind writer, and old friend of her's by the name of John Patmos, he knew the mountain better than anyone and could help her find her way.

Madalyn walked a long way through many towns and made very few friends along the way. She was friendly with a shepherd she met, but he kept trying to get her to lie in green pastures and lead her to still waters, but this she did not have time for. She also met two brothers, but left once they began to quarrel. The walk became very lonesome, and she was left with her thoughts only. Why did this man decide to take her family members? What had they done? Madalyn began to

question the power and the existence of this man. It seemed silly to put her faith in this man who had robbed her of her family and who she had never seen before.

Finally she reached John's house, it was identical to how her mother had described. She walked up the steps and knocked on the door, the echo of her fist on the wood was followed by the sounds of shuffled footsteps.

"Madalyn! I've been expecting you! Your mother messaged me a few days ago, I hear you're going to climb *the* mountain. I know quite a bit on that subject, so come on in."

Madalyn took her seat opposite of John, and listened to his instructions carefully.

"Before you get to the man in the mountain you'll pass through his three...assistants I guess you could call them. They each have something they use to talk to the man in the mountain that you'll need, luckily they all need something in return and I happen to have exactly what each of them need" John instructed.

"Thank you so much John! This is really the biggest help," Madalyn praised.

"There is one thing I need from you, I need you to take this kid Isaac up with you" John requested.

"John are you serious? This is kind of a solo-person journey," Madalyn reasoned.

"Him and his dad have been having a tough time and believe me he DEFINITELY has some things he should take up with the man in the mountain. He's just in the other room you'll love him I promise." John persuaded.

John called for Isaac, a lanky boy about Madalyn's age appeared, he seemed perfectly normal in his gawky glory, except for the scratch marks across his face.

"OH MY GOD WHAT HAPPENED?!?" Madalyn exclaimed in concern.

"It was a father son bonding day gone wrong" Isaac mumbled.

John gave them a satchel with everything that they'd need and off they went together, to go talk to the man in the mountain.

"So were you guys hunting or..." Madalyn said referring to Isaac's scratches.

"Well I wasn't..." Isaac trailed off.

"What does that mean?"

"Can we please talk about something else?" Isaac snapped.

"So, what do you think of the man in the mountain?" Madalyn asked.

"I think he's kind of a jerk, what about you?"

"I don't think he's real" Madalyn sing-songed casually.

"What?!? Then why are you even doing this?" Isaac said sounding puzzled.

"Well I mean I can't be sure, and if he's not real I can tell my town and they can stop throwing their stupid money in those stupid baskets that may be going to no one." Madalyn said.

Isaac said nothing, but as they approached the first assistant, he thought about what she said.

A cave embedded in the mountain was surrounded by a plateaued piece of land with a wooden sign sticking out of the ground reading: "*Tsirhc lives here.*" Isaac and Madalyn approached the cave where they heard an echoing whimper approaching them.

“Ow...ow...ow...ow” a skinny man with a long beard exclaimed with every step he took.

“Sir? Sir? Are you ok?” Madalyn asked.

“Oh yes, yes my hands and feet just get a little sore” Tsrhc brushed off his obvious pain.

Madalyn and Isaac gasped as they looked down to see a singular punctured hole in both hands and feet.

“What do I- OW- owe the pleasure of this- ow ow ow- visit?” Tsrhc asked.

“We uh...we...dude are you sure you’re ok?...We brought you something you need because we need to talk to the man in the mountain,” Isaac responded .

“HA. There’s nothing I could- OW OW OW-possibly need, I’m perfectly fine right where- OUCH- I am” Tsrhc struggled to get through his words as he limped closer to Madalyn and Isaac.

Madalyn rummaged through the satchel till she found a pair of gloves and a pair of socks, the gift intended for Tsrhc.

“Not even these” Madalyn said holding them in front of him.

Tsrhc eyed them longingly before limping back to his cave and coming out with two sticks tied together.

“What’re we supposed to do with this?” Isaac asked skeptically.

“Trust me the man in the mountain will love it, can I have the socks now?” Tsrhc said eagerly waiting.

Madalyn handed him the socks and gloves, which he eagerly put on, and limped a little less noticeably back to his cave.

“One down two to go” Madalyn beamed.

The next cave was identical to Tsrhc’s except this sign read: “*Dammahom lives here.*”

“Hello?” Isaac called out.

Immediately after he spoke the whole mountain shook, rocks flying everywhere as a kind faced man appeared.

“Sorry about this! The mountain just kind of moves with me!” Dammahom yelled over the sound of the mountain rumbling.

“To what do I owe the pleasure?” Dammahom said calmly, the rumbling had come to a stand still as Dammahom himself stood still.

“We need to talk to the man in the mountain; we can offer you what you need in exchange.” Madalyn explained.

“Well, that’s very kind but I don’t need anything. I mean, sure, it’d be nice if maybe I had a few friends and everyone stopped getting so mad at me but I totally love having some me time so I’m really all good,” Dammahom smiled.

Madalyn looked through the satchel again, there she found a single olive branch, which she guessed applied to Dammahom.

“You don’t need this?” Madalyn asked, watching as Dammahom’s eyes lit up.

“Stay there!” Dammahom explained as he sent the mountain into a fury as he ran back to his cave to retrieve something.

Dammahom came back with a thick book, filled with what appeared to be scribbles.

“Ummm...what do we do with it?” Madalyn asked.

“Just trust me the man in the mountain will love it, can I have that?” Dammahom asked sheepishly gesturing towards the branch.

Madalyn extended it to him and he took it eagerly, skipping back to the cave while muttering something about visiting Tsirhc.

Finally Madalyn and Isaac reached the final cave. This one, however, was different from the others. The typical sign stood reading: “*Haissem lives here.*” There was no rumbling or whimpering though, just three men sitting in lawn chairs by the cave entrance.

“Is um...is Haissem here?” Isaac asked.

“He’ll be here soon, we’re waiting” explained the first man.

“Well he would’ve been here sooner if the cave was the original size” the second man complained.

“You guys he’s gonna be here like any second stop arguing” snapped the third man.

“I’m telling you if the cave was back to how it originally was, we wouldn’t be sitting here like idiots” huffed the second man.

“You know what Dave? I am so sick of you. NEWS FLASH WE CAN’T CHANGE THE CAVE IT’S NOT JUST OUR CAVE, WE SHARE IT” the third man yelled at the second.

“Oh excuse me Jacob, I didn’t realize you were the resident Haissem expert, especially since HE’S NOT HERE” Dave snapped back.

Madalyn and Isaac waited for their moment to break into the conversation to offer them what gifts they had to bare, but the argument seemed quite old and like it wasn’t about to end anytime soon.

“Isaac, Isaac over there” Madalyn whispered, noticing something shiny dangling off the wooden sign.

They approached it to see a shining silver necklace with a pendant resembling some sort of star. Madalyn reached for the last gift in the satchel: a map. Madalyn and Isaac exchanged a knowing look, taking the necklace and leaving the map for Haissem.

“Well let’s go bust the greatest myth of all” Madalyn smiled, her words making Isaac think.

Madalyn and Isaac continued the journey up the mountain. They approached the top of the cave where the man in the mountain lived. A long carved staircase lead to the dark cave entrance.

“Let’s go!” Madalyn said enthusiastically.

Isaac grabbed her wrist, stopping her from going in.

“Madalyn...we can’t go in there” Isaac stated.

“Isaac what are you talking about?! We’ve worked so hard just for this. Just to see if he’s in there” Madalyn tried to reason.

“We can’t go in there because you don’t want to, and neither do I. You think all you want is to know the truth, but that’s not true. You just can’t put faith into something blindly but you better learn because everyone needs something to believe in; to take a chance on. You talk about how those people put money in baskets to give to some made up power figure, but you’re an idiot if you think any one of those people did that for a man in the mountain. They did it for hope. They pay to further an illusion that control is in the hands of someone that loves them. Do you really want to live the rest of your life with the knowledge that you have no power in the tragedies or blessings given to you? To those people that money is their missing family coming back; it’s their good health being restored. It’s the faith that they can undo their own tragedy. It’s their hope. What happens if that cave is empty? What if your family is really gone? Wouldn’t you rather live with a lie that gives you hope than a truth that tears you down. I get it though, I really do. I’d love nothing more than to storm in that cave to find some old man with a beard and give him an earful about how you can’t just tell a father to kill his son for no reason. But what if I go in there and it’s empty? Then I’d have to live with the fact my dad is a psychopath. I’m not saying you have to believe in him specifically. Believe in what you want but everyone needs something to take a chance on. Life would be too boring if you didn’t. Maybe there’s a man in there and maybe there’s not, I can’t really say. What I can say is this: walking down this mountain thinking you might be able to see your family again is going to feel a hell of a lot better than walking down knowing you never will.”

Madalyn loosened her wrist from Isaac’s grip and moved her hand to hold his.

“Let’s go home,” she smiled.

Isaac and Madalyn walked back down the mountain, hearing the cheers of the men as Haissem arrived, the rumble of the mountain as Dammahom laughed next to Tsrhc, and the silence where Tsrhc’s whimpers once were.

“I think I like walking down the mountain a lot more than walking up,” Madalyn said.

Isaac beamed down at her.

“Me too.”

*The End*